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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE APPOINTMENT OF FORMER TALIBAN OFFICAL AS
GOVERNOR OF URUZGAN

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES RICHARD NORLAND FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Summary. President Karzai has informally indicated that he will appoint Mullah Abdul Hakim Munib as the new governor of Uruzgan. Munib is a former high-ranking Taliban official who has reconciled with the government of Afghanistan. Karzai mentioned the decision in passing during a meeting with General Abizaid on January 24 (septel), but gave no details. Separately, CFC-A Commanding General Eikenberry was informed of the decision while visiting the National Security Council on January 22. The General had the opportunity to meet with Munib; details of that meeting are contained below. President Karzai has not yet formally informed the Embassy or, so far as we can tell, any other members of international community. Munib said he expects to take up his appointment sometime after the London Conference. End summary.

Biographical information

2. (C) Abdul Hakim Munib (or Monib) who arrived in Kabul with the Taliban forces in 1996, was first appointed Deputy Minister of Communications. He then changed portfolios to become Deputy Minister of Frontier Affairs, where he served under Jalaluddin Haqqani. His name was put on the U.N. 1267 sanctions list in that capacity. (Note: Haqqani now leads an anti-Coalition militia force operating out of Miram Shah, North Waziristan, Pakistan. End note.) In summer 2001 he was appointed Deputy Minister of Transportation. Munib traveled abroad in the early days of the Taliban regime to enlist recognition of it as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. In late 2001 he broke with the regime and offered his allegiance to opposition figures including Sayed Ahmad Gilani and King Mohammad Zahir Shah, but was rebuffed. Munib has since reconciled with the Afghan government through the Program-e Takhim-e Sulh (PTS). He was recently denied a J visa for travel to the U.S. on an IV program.

3. (C) According to Embassy contacts, Munib was born in 1969 in Zurmat District, Paktia province. (The 1267 list gives his DOB as 1973 or 1976). By his own statement the son of a simple farmer, he studied in various madrassas in Pakistan, completing his higher studies at the Jama, at ul-Uloom Islamia, Binori town, Karachi, aka Jamia Binoria. From there he was recruited to join the Taliban in their military campaign in Afghanistan. (Note: Jamia Binoria has long been known as a feeder school for the Taliban and had strong links to Al Qaeda. End note.) He played a leading role in a particularly well-known battle against the Northern Alliance that took place on the Shumali Plain north of Kabul.

4. (C) After the fall of the Taliban, Munib returned to Zurmat district, where he is currently serving as the Imam of a mosque in the village of Hazrat Khail and head of the district shura. (Note: Regional Command East Poloff reports that Zurmat District has long been a staging area for Anti-Coalition Militia in the Loya Paktia area - Paktia, Paktika, and Khost. Coalition forces continue to have significant problems there. PRTOff reports that Paktia Governor Taniwal, himself one of the most effective Afghan governors, considers Munib a good man and a positive element for Afghanistan. End note.) Munib received international press attention in January 2002 when he accused the Coalition of having mistakenly bombed a group of civilian elders who he said were traveling to Kabul to congratulate Hamid Karzai on his appointment as head of the interim government. He next surfaced as a member of the Constitutional Loya Jirga in 2003. Most recently, he ran for Parliament in the September elections, coming in eighth out of 68 candidates with

3.6 percent of the vote. This was not enough to gain him a seat in Parliament.

Munib,s View of his Appointment

15. (C) Munib told LTG Eikenberry that since the open break with the Taliban, Mullah Omar issued a fatwa against him which has resulted in two assassination attempts. This may or may not be separate from the fatwa issued against all former Taliban who participated in the emergency Loya Jirga. Munib said that while the Taliban were initially popular because of their ability to provide security, their failure to deliver on other basic needs like reconstruction and development caused many people to turn against them - a warning that resonates today. In a press interview in 2003, at the time of the Loya Jirga, he characterized himself as a moderate Taliban who had disagreed with many of the extreme policies of the regime including the treatment of women. Munib told Eikenberry that he is aware of the daunting challenge facing him in Uruzgan, a province he has never visited. He stated his intent to serve the people of the province with honesty.

Comment

16. (C) This appointment, if it goes forward, is sure to generate controversy. We do not yet have anything from President Karzai - who has now left for Davos - on the logic behind the appointment, but we can assume it is an attempt to garner the support of local citizens in this extremely conservative province, often called the Taliban Heartland. Our PRT officer in Uruzgan will provide a separate assessment of the likely reaction there to Munib,s appointment. The present governor, Jan Mohammad, despite his reputation for corruption and lack of governance skills, has a firm grip on power in the district and is known as a fierce fighter against the Taliban (though himself a former Talib). If he accepts that Munib has genuinely renounced his former allegiance he may well support the choice - and one assumes that President Karzai has consulted closely with him about it. According to the Deputy National Security Advisor, Munib has the support of the southern governors of Helmand, Kandahar, and Zabol, who hope to work closely with him on stabilizing the dangerous area shared by all four provinces.

17. (C) Karzai must also know that he will cause a flurry of reaction locally and internationally. Northern Alliance members who fought against the Taliban will likely react strongly, as will Hazaras whose community members were slaughtered by the regime. Women,s groups will also respond. Internationally, Russia is likely to oppose removing his name from the 1267 list and human rights groups may react strongly. We should also expect questions about Karzai,s commitment to human rights principles, since Munib has never publicly renounced the ideological underpinnings of his Taliban years - he is on record as saying he would always be a Talib (student) and that he supported the idea of a true Islamic state of Afghanistan, though he did not define what that meant.

18. (C) In making this choice Karzai was likely motivated by a desire to appeal to the Taliban in Uruzgan and by broader reconciliation goals. Indeed, while it is likely to cause significant repercussions on the human rights front, the appointment may very well improve the security situation in this key province. In any case, since Karzai appears determined to press ahead with it, we will want to look closely at Munib,s human rights record, especially in light of an expected GOA request to have his name removed from the 1267 list. If Karzai is determined to do this, it would behoove him to mount a PR campaign explaining why Munib is the best person for the job of running what is arguably Afghanistan,s most troublesome province.

NORLAND